

Money, Politics and Religion: A Survey of Anglo-American Influence in TESOL

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Abstract

This paper will consider some of the aspects related to the teaching of English as an International Language. What are some of the wider sociopolitical forces that shape our decisions as language teachers? As educators ethically reflect upon their role, how will their decisions support or subvert the aims of those who have a stake in the continued supremacy of the English language?

Introduction

Just over ten years ago, Phillipson (1992) stated that, in terms of language teaching, "...the connections between the English language and political, economic, and military power are seldom pursued" (p.8). This state of affairs changed dramatically following the Anglo-American-Australian invasion of Iraq in 2003. According to Morgan (2003), even conservative think tanks are now proclaiming that America has drifted from a republic to becoming an unacknowledged empire ("Debate Over U.S. 'Empire'"). Templer (2003a) reports that discussions are underway within the British Council and US State Department to recruit English teachers in the "reconstruction" of Iraq (4). He states:

...the lucrative market for EFL being opened up by our generals will be a windfall for teachers from Sydney to Seattle. Experts from numerous other fields will also be recruited to reshape Iraqi education from kindergarten to university. Platoons of Western researchers, including graduate students, will likely descend on Iraq as transnational foundations seek to fund new projects (Templer, 2003a).

EFL teachers, according to Edge (2003b), have become an academic army that pacifies intellectual resistance and occupies the linguistic dominions of an Anglophonic empire:

...it is now possible to see us, EFL teachers, as a second wave of imperial troopers. Before the armoured divisions have withdrawn from the city limits, while the soldiers are still patrolling the streets, English teachers will be facilitating the policies that the tanks were sent to impose. And wherever, and to whomsoever, I teach EFL, I am part of that overarching system (p.10).

With America in the nexus of this overarching system, explicit rewards and implicit threats are meted out to those living in what Kachru (1985) calls "expanding circle countries" (p.13). Greater access to political, economic and sociocultural opportunities is bestowed upon those on the linguistic periphery who have mastered the English language and conformed to Anglo-American norms. Economic marginalization, cultural isolation and, as in the recent cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, full-scale military action await the rogues who rebel.

What are English language teachers to do under the shadow of this Anglo-American hegemony? By teaching English to our learners, are we contributing to the improvement of our respective nations and communities, or are we unwittingly cooperating in neocolonial reconstruction? This paper reviews several current themes that may stimulate further debate on this issue, by examining the ostensibly Anglo-American influence of economics, cultural politics and religion in TESOL¹. Considerations for the language classroom will be offered at the close of this paper.

Anglo-American linkage to issues in TESOL

At the onset, it must be admitted that linking the current dynamics of TESOL to the American or Anglo-American hegemony is admittedly tenuous. What this paper will seek to highlight may strike some as being occasionally true for American TESOL, true at other times only for American TESOL teachers of a certain ideological persuasion, and perhaps equally true for many Anglophone teachers in specific situations. Some might add that what has been portrayed as "American" could also be found in the cultures of other countries.

These charges are compelling, yet it might be helpful to recognize that this paper will not suggest that America reigns supreme over TESOL; rather, America exerts *significant influence* over how the whole construct of English language education is framed. David Crystal (2000), in his seminal work entitled *English as a Global Language*, argues:

Given that the USA has come to be the dominant element in so many of the domains identified...the future status of English must be bound up to some extent with the future of that country. So much of the power which has fuelled the growth of the English language in the twentieth century has stemmed from America (p.117).

1. Because of the negative connotations associated with the word "foreign", the acronym TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) was avoided in favor of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). In most cases during this report, TESOL will refer to pedagogic practices, not the professional organization, (also known as TESOL) which is based in the United States.

Crystal (2000) explains that America contains four times more monolingual native English speakers than any other country in the world. Combined with economic clout and world prestige, America's linguistic prominence extends to international scientific and technological developments, the creation of the Internet (of which over 80% is in English) a majority of the world's reading material being printed in English and an increase in Americanisms in languages throughout the world. Higa (1979,p.278 in Kachru, 1994,p.139) observes that when two cultures meet, and "if one is more dominant or advanced than the other, the directionality of culture learning and subsequent word-borrowing is not mutual, but from the dominant to the subordinate". America's growing economic and military dominance has secured it greater influence (though not full control) over the issues discussed so far in this paper. Moreover, despite the growing wave of anti-American sentiment in the world following its recent invasion of Iraq, US interests still have international ramifications and a bearing on many of the issues affecting TESOL. Let us now move to a survey of the interaction that TESOL has with money, politics and religion.

TESOL and economics

TESOL is big business. McCallen's 1989 economic study of TESOL (in Phillipson, 1992) describes it as a "world commodity" worth billions of dollars. A major service industry, imports and exports related to TESOL contribute significantly to local and international economic development (Dyke, 2003). As a robust growth industry, people living in Kachru's (1985 p.13) "outer circle" countries, (e.g. Singapore, Nigeria and India), are beginning to see their ability to speak English as a way to cash in on lucrative economic opportunities. Observe Kachru's (2003b) recent remarks:

"The region has realised that now is the time to seek rewards by the 'commodification' of the language. What matters is that South Asia's creative writers in English, English Language Teachers, IT specialists, and medical and other technical professionals are rejoicing over their use of this linguistic commodity in the global context".

Thousands of private language institutes worldwide recruit native English Language teachers, promising good salaries and an exotic overseas adventure. Such positions do exist, and the remuneration for native-speaker teachers of English can be better or at least equal to entry-level salaries in the respective expanding circle countries, but McCallen (1989) notes that as lucrative a business that TESOL may be, the majority of teachers are not well paid, and many work in unglamorous, unstable teaching environments. TESOL for these teachers is more a job than a profession.

Every day, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of students flock to schools or attend classes at universities with the hope of getting well-paid jobs. It is not coincidental that Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995 in Lee, 2003) use the term *investment* rather than *motivation* to describe the complex reasons why many learners study English. The associations of English with prosperity are widespread. Writing about the situation in the Philippines, Jeffrey (2002) warns:

...those that adopt English and use it alongside their own culture, and combine it with, for example, communications technology, can possibly escape from the poverty-trap and catch up with developed countries rapidly (p.67).

Setting aside the unfortunate implication that those who do not adopt English run the risk of becoming backward and underdeveloped, attitudes such as these are common among those who support the hegemony of English. Edge (2003,p.706) responds:

This, fundamentally, is what hegemony means: a relationship based not upon explicit coercion, but on established power and the consent of the majority to go along with the arrangements that flow from that power because of the rewards that we receive.

Phillipson (quoted in Fox, 2003) contends that the notion of English study bringing economic success is a myth that has been maintained by the elite of the outer and expanding circle countries. In actuality, English becomes for many "a barrier to restrict entry into the cathedrals of the powerful" (Fox, 2003, "TEFL as Imperialism"). Hazita Azman (in Fox, 2003) found this to be true for the Malaysian teaching context, where the government has attempted to link English language education to IT skills as a means to further scientific and economic development. She reports that the initiative is failing because rural Malay students typically see "very little need for English in the social world", and fewer than 5% had access to a computer or possessed even basic computer literacy skills. In relation to the urban-rural divide in Malaysia, Gerry Abbott (1992) reports:

...a racial elite in Malaysia has established residential schools for selected Malays who are prepared for Cambridge English examinations and further education through the medium of English in other countries, while the normal schools must prepare students for exams not acceptable to universities in those countries. One irony about cultural imperialism, then, is that people inflict it upon others of the same nationality (p.175).

However, where some see the potential for economic repression in TESOL, others see opportunity. Tully (1997,p.163) calls for Indians to promote the spread of English

throughout the rural areas in order to divest the elite of their hold on the language. Bisong (1995) finds Phillipson's (1992) argument too simplistic, and feels that the spread of English in Nigeria has been a positive development. He contends that "reasons for learning English now are more pragmatic in nature" than during the days of British colonial rule; "Nigerians are sophisticated enough to know what is in their interest, and that interest includes the ability to operate with two or more linguistic codes in a multilingual situation" (Bisong, 1995,p.131). As this debate continues, let us now consider the domain of cultural politics as it relates to TESOL.

TESOL and cultural politics

Is it possible to sidestep the entire discussion up to this point by simply "teaching English"? There are those who feel that a neutral approach to teaching English is possible. Stating that there is "no cultural value tied to the learning of English," Wardaugh (1987,p.15) claims that English is "...tied to no particular social, political, economic or religious system, or to a specific racial or cultural group." Similar views are expressed by Seaton, (1997,p.381) who opines that English has become a neutral means for global communication in "transnational companies, internet communication, scientific research, youth culture, international goods and services and news and entertainment media". These also represent examples of discourse communities that are growing worldwide, which rely on English as a lingua franca in order to maintain communication with each other.

At the other end of the spectrum is Dua (1994), who rejects a neutral portrayal of English. He writes that it "must be realized that language is basically involved with class, power and knowledge" (p.133). Pretending that English is apolitical, according to Phillipson (1992), is, among other things, "an uncritical endorsement of capitalism...transnationalization, [and] the Americanization and homogenization of world culture" (p.274). The current spread of English, he maintains, is oppressive because it imposes Western "mental structures" on the minds of the learners (Phillipson, 1992,p.166). This is seen most visibly in the vast amounts of TESOL materials exported from center countries to the outer circle, which often require learners to conform to Anglo-American styles of communication. With regard to this issue, McKay (2002,p.120-121) criticizes the international spread of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), claiming that the western underpinnings of the approach, which focus on democracy, individuality, creativity and social expression, often marginalize local language teachers, and fail to meet the needs of students, who often prefer a teacher-centered pedagogic approach.

Rajagopalan (1999), on the other hand, rejects the whole concept of linguistic imperialism, calling it "grossly and sensationally blown out of proportion" (p.201). Without discounting the problems of minority languages being endangered by the

spread of English, he states rather matter-of-factly that language in this multilingual world has less to do with cooperation and more to do with competition:

it is in the very nature of human languages, all of them, to be driven by power inequalities. This means that EFL teachers have no special reason to feel guilty about being complicit in a gigantic neo-colonialist enterprise in the guise of emancipatory pedagogy (Rajagopalan, 1999,p.205).

The hyperbole used to describe the hegemonic spread of English, Rajagopalan (1999) explains, is built upon the assumption that the English language invades "(a) ...a monolingual setting, [where] communication is always perfect, and (b) communicative harmony is invariably threatened every time there is the intrusion of an alien tongue" (p.202). English, at least for Rajagopalan, is just another language. In the current climate of increased international exchange, he feels that the threat of one more language is negligible.

Such an opinion makes sense to one growing up in multilingual cultures like India, Singapore or Nigeria. But Rajagopalan has inadvertently touched upon an important point: some of the strongest opponents of the spread of English originate from countries with well-established monolingual settings that emphasize correct forms of communication, and avoid communicative disharmony. A number of countries along the Asian Pacific rim might fit this category. Rajagopalan's (1999) implication is that the objections against English come from older nationalistic hegemonies that wish to preserve their hold on "zealously guarded cultural boundaries" (204). While decrying the loss of a linguistic ideal for their countries, Rajagopalan (1999) explains that these linguists have failed to accept the political reality of internationalization, which even now is in the process of replacing nationalism much in the way that nation-states replaced earlier political models during the 15th and 16th centuries. One of the unavoidable results of globalization has been the compromise of linguistic and cultural borders by the onslaught of English via satellite, entertainment media, the Internet, and the ever-increasing migration of English language teachers.

Pennycook (1999) finds all three of the viewpoints presented in this section to be too simplistic. He emphasizes that TESOL should be understood "not merely as a language of imperialism, but also as one of the key languages of resistance" (1994,p.262). Crookes (2003) has certainly found this to be the case. In his survey of English language education in Japan, Pakistan, North Korea and Saddam Hussein-era Iraq, pedagogic materials have been appropriated to teach a political and social agenda that often stands in stark opposition to the aims of the Anglo-American hegemony. Another example of this can be seen in the People's Republic of China, where Shi and Fujii (2003) found that English language textbooks would not be published unless they explicitly teach Communist ideology and promote nationalist

Chinese sentiment. With the potential of English becoming a tool for conflict rather than a medium for communication, Pennycook (1999) calls for the creation of "third places" or "third cultures" where there is "both a political understanding of the global role of English and a means to understand contextually how English is used, taken up [and] changed."

Third places

Currently the bulk of the literature on cultural politics and TESOL suggests that English language education is a politically charged practice. However, the restive discourse in TESOL's academic community is also leading to the formation of various "third places." One of these third places is in the ongoing native/non-native educator dialogue. Another is the study of English as an International Language.

Until the late 1980s, the issue of discrimination between native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English teachers (non-NESTs) was generally ignored. Most seem to have blindly accepted the myth that native English speakers were best suited as language teachers, and that while the non-native teachers of English had their place, it was only in a support role to the "real" task of Communicative Language Teaching. Such views are now condemned as a form of linguistic apartheid. The number of bilingual English speakers is constantly growing, and there are now increasing numbers of well trained, fluent non-native teachers of English in the expanding circle than in any other moment in world history. Medgyes (1996,p.41-42) explains that it is very difficult to define who is and who is not a "native speaker" in today's international society. He concludes that both NESTs and non-NESTs are needed, because they ideally bring different experiences and different types of expertise to the classroom. Tajino and Tajino (2000,p.9-10) show that this ideal can be realized, once a community spirit is developed within the class and between teachers. Instead of a dichotomy between native and non-native speakers, Rampton (1996,p.19) proposes the concept of *expert speakers*. Focusing on expertise rather than upon one's inherited language seems to be a helpful paradigm shift. While hiring practices in many institutions lag far behind this view, and discrimination often persists against experts or NESTs who do not "look" or "sound" like Anglo-Americans, (Thomas, 1999,p.6), it is believed that with time, more and more schools will employ language teachers who represent the linguistic reality of today's world.

As a third place, the study of English as an International Language (EIL) is still a hotbed of debate and controversy within the field of TESOL. Sifakis (2004) explains this is because EIL as an area of study touches upon numerous domains, such as national identity, linguistic human rights, ethno linguistics and educational sociology. This also contributes to the difficulty that scholars have had in defining the scope and nature of EIL. Yoneoka (2003) explains:

EIL, like any standard, is an idealization of a language that is not actually spoken by any single person. But unlike other standards, is not claimed, created, controlled or dominated by any particular person or group. Thus no one has either the authority to prescribe what it should be, or the omnipotence to describe what it might be under every possible circumstance.

Nevertheless, there are some general principles emerging that most scholars agree will complement the teaching of English as an International Language. One of these is that EIL should be taught within the context of the local educational culture, and that EIL should avoid Western teaching materials and approaches. People are encouraged to think globally but teach locally. McKay (2003,p.140) insists that by contextualizing English to the local needs and interests of the learners, they can truly claim ownership of the language as their own tool of expression.

Another feature is that EIL is often understood as belonging equally to all speakers of English. The "native speaker" standard is rejected. Such an idea is receiving greater attention throughout the Asia Pacific region. In a recent interview, Takao Suzuki, an internationally respected Professor Emeritus from Japan's Keio University, sums up the feelings of many Japanese when he remarked:

We shouldn't have to apologize for using "Japanese English." The notion that English belongs to the Americans or the Britons is narrow-minded. English is now the language of the world ("Giving English Firmer Focus", 1999,p.2).

Kubota (2001, in Kasai, 2003,p.20) echoes these views, stating that "English no longer belongs only to 'native speakers' of the Inner Circle; it is used by other people in bilingual/multilingual situations with various forms of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and discourse." Similar views can be found in the statements of writers throughout the outer and expanding circle countries.

EIL is also viewed as being actualized when expert speakers of different countries use their form of English not only for transactional communication, but also for creating friendly relationships with each other, something known as *comity* (Aston, 1988 in McKay, 2002,p.75). The pragmatic rules of communication used by speakers of inner circle countries are no longer the standard. English speakers of the outer and expanding circle are encouraged to communicate in a way that feels natural to them. Aikawa (2003), for example, found in his study that by encouraging an Asian style of communication in English, Japanese and Taiwanese speakers of English experienced greater comfort and a more satisfying level of communication.

It can be seen that the supporters of EIL are involved in a serious political undertaking. EIL is construed as an attempt to denationalize English and divest the American hegemony from its claim on the English language (Kachru, 1992,p.1-17). The EIL Movement, led often by fluent non-native speakers of English from outer and expanding circle countries, recognize that access to the higher levels of power within the American hegemony is limited. Therefore, many seem to be attempting to create an alternative linguistic power base that is free from American influence. EIL is also an expression of a basic need that English speakers have everywhere: the heartfelt desire to be free from what is seen as the oppressive and unattainable standard of the Anglo-American "native speaker", and to begin to speak English in a manner which complements their cultural preferences.

These efforts to encourage the acceptance of a denationalized English are admirable, and it is felt that the EIL movement should be supported by all language teachers. However, sometimes there is a clash between what our emotions tell us as language teachers, and what must be acknowledged logically. A number of difficulties are perceived to exist within current models of EIL. These are the difficulties within the terminology of "international", pedagogic ambiguity, and the problems of standards.

The problem with international languages

In Western history, Hellenization, and then Romanization were terms used by the Greeks and Romans to describe (what they would interpret as) an increased level of civilization. A common language (Greek, then Latin) was central to the goal of dominating vast numbers of people from different cultures and language groups. Because the English language is currently a fundamental aspect of internationalization, and given America's present power in the world, there is a question of whether internationalization is really in actuality an American vision of Westernization.

Although proponents of EIL state that English must be distanced from the American Empire for it to become truly international, it is impractical to simply ignore the fact that an American-led hegemony benefits greatly from an enthusiastic promotion of EIL. More speakers of English would create a larger market for American products, services and entertainment. Pennycook (1995,p.54) is concerned that "International" English might speed up an oppressive and relentless flow of people, goods and western ideas, which would eventually result in the creation of larger versions of the current national socioeconomic rifts, and further the marginalization of minority cultures, languages, religions and ethnic groups.

Pedagogic ambiguity

In his survey of the literature that reappraised the appropriacy of CLT, Hadley (1998, p.62) summarized the criticisms of CLT as being difficult to define, encouraging unbridled eclecticism, and leading to interlingual fossilization. It is interesting to note that while proponents of EIL claim that Western pedagogic methods such as CLT or Task-Based Learning (TBL) are incompatible with educational cultures across the world, in actuality, EIL suffers from the same weaknesses found in Communicative Language Teaching.

Because of its very scope, the nature of EIL has been very difficult to define. Numerous definitions and formulations for EIL exist. Coupled with the idea of "thinking globally and teaching locally," these notions lend to the condition where English language education becomes so contextualized to each local situation that the international element may be lost. So long as it is free from perceived Anglo-American influence, pedagogic practices may be deemed "international." However, it may be difficult for classroom practitioners to think globally while teaching locally. The local context, as it has always been for language teachers, is immediate and concrete. Global issues and international understanding are more distant and less easy to concretize in the classroom. While the goal of oral communication is for fostering comity between learners of different language groups instead of native speakers, for monolingual classes such as Japan, it differs little whether students practice while envisaging a communicative episode with an archetypal native speaker or a second language speaker of English abroad – neither are in the classroom at the time they are learning. Encouraging learners to speak so as to get their idea across to others is seen as one realization of International English. However, "communication for the purposes of comity" seems to implicitly emulate the concept of "basic communicative competence" which was advocated in CLT. McKay (2002, p.121) suggests a return to traditional, teacher-centered grammar-based language teaching methods would lessen the negative effects of CLT or TBL, empower teachers, and provide students with classes that fit the expectations of local educational cultures, which often focus on reading and writing skills.

However, traditional grammar-based teaching is as political an exercise as the potentially democratic teaching methods found in CLT or TBL. The teaching of grammar can be a very authoritarian model. The teacher is the sole expert who controls the flow of information to the learners. The teacher chooses grammatical examples of the language, which modern linguistics has shown to be, at best, only true for some of the time. Grammar tests often demonstrate less about how much the students have acquired English, and more about to what extent they have conformed to the teacher.

Fossilization is another problem, because it may lead to the further disempowerment of some learners. Many of the proponents of EIL very skillfully use Anglo-American models of English communication, with a significant number achieving a near-native speaker standard in the language. However, by not holding their learners up to a similar level, they implicitly encourage learners to acquire a level of English that, while good enough for basic communication, may be below the level of what some could have been able to achieve.

Language learners in the expanding circle are caught between two untenable positions: In the Anglo-American Hegemony, learners are encouraged to strive to become like Americans or the elite speakers of their own society, but with little economic or social rewards for their efforts. However, if the learners follow the suggestions of some of today's EIL proponents, they are literally "kept in their place" by being taught a form of English which is clearly less proficient than the elite members of their society. In this state of fossilization, learners are returned to a state of dependence and conformity. The flow of information from the American Hegemony would still be controlled by the elite, with only the acceptable information to be filtered down to the rest of society. In the meantime, those who seek comity on their own run the risk of increased misunderstanding, thus creating the need for experts to come in to assist in the process of clear communication.

The problem of standards

It seems clear that EIL pedagogy would benefit from a generally accepted global standard. This, however, is the most serious problem that EIL currently faces. If English has become the property of the world, and educated Anglo-American English is to be rejected as the global standard, what is to prevent the English language from developing into mutually unintelligible dialects? Some, such as Larry Smith (2003), state that worries about a common communicative standard in EIL are unwarranted; over the past 200 years, native English speakers from different regions of the world have often found others unintelligible. According to this view, English as an International Language will always be used on different levels by people of varying ability, from basilects (people who speak a highly localized version of English that is pidginized with another regional language), to mesolects (people who have studied English more or less formally, but who have limited proficiency in using the language), to acrolects (expert speakers of English often of near-native language ability). Smith (2003) argues that EIL will be spoken in various forms, as it always has been. Some versions of English will be spoken in order to be understood by a wide group of listeners, and some local versions will be intended to limit understanding to a select group of insiders.

Honna (2003) adds that no language touches others without being affected in some way. In a natural process known as diffusion, English will change and grow as it spreads across the world and is used by more and more people from different language groups. Widdowson (2003,p.55) sees the types of Englishes used by basilects and mesolects as "virtual languages": different species of English that are incompatible with other species of English in other parts of the world. He believes with McKay (2002,p.76) that a global standard for English will be created naturally by those participating in the International Community. However, most of those who participate in the international community are often acrolects or high-level mesolects who represent the elite classes of their societies. Either many have had the opportunity to master English by studying in top national universities under the tutelage of well-trained teachers from center countries or, as is often the case, they have studied abroad in one of the center countries. The standard that these speakers often follow resembles that of high prestige Anglo-American varieties. It is the same standard which is broadcast daily via satellite to every corner of the world, published in a majority of the world's books, and heard in movies and on CDs. This reality has been noted by the masses living in the outer and expanding circle countries. Honna (2003) admits that, despite the message of linguistic liberation implicit in the present understandings of EIL, most parents and students still aim for the Anglo-American standard, because for them, it represents a linguistic "American Dream", that is, success and increased opportunities via mastery of the English language. This also suggests why some students and parents question whether one can or should divorce Anglo-American standards from the English language. Metaphorically speaking, to some, EIL may seem like taking the flavor out of a meal while attempting to preserve its nutritional value, or perhaps of injecting an imported fruit with the flavor of a local vegetable. It may take some time for more students and teachers to adjust their linguistic palate in order to "swallow" the proposition of a native-speaker free standard for EIL.

Neither the supporters of the American Hegemony nor many of the proponents of EIL presently seem to offer much hope for language learners. English as an International Language does exist, but no one has yet been able to either control it or define what it is in the process of becoming. Using American models as a counterbalance only serves to bind EIL as a "non-American" form of English. World Englishes, such as those found in Singapore, India or Nigeria evolved only after the collapse of the British Empire, when these former colonies made their own decisions about the uses of English. Perhaps EIL might become a more vibrant reality in the minds of students, parents and many school administrators, once American power begins to wane in the world. Continued debate and discussion on the topic of EIL are necessary to form a better understanding of what it entails.

Nevertheless, while the present state of EIL is still nebulous, language teachers should still anticipate an evolution in the way that English will be taught in the 21st century. In this vein, Sifakis (forthcoming) and McKay (2003, p.140) are among those who are beginning to suggest ways and means to approach the subject. EIL as a pedagogic discipline is coming. Hill (2003) proclaims that when it does arrive, changes in attitudes towards accuracy over fluency, an increase in the creation of materials contextualized for the local culture, greater adaptation to the local culture, respect of non-NESTs, and an increased awareness of the political nature of English will be minimum requirements for language teachers of the future.

It is seen that even within the third places of TESOL, whether it relates to attitudes related to native speakers or English as an International Language, issues are inextricably linked with notions of power, especially of who has it and who wants it. We will now shift our attention from temporal power to that of spiritual power.

TESOL and religion

Recently, in the periodical *Christianity Today*, an article by Agnieszka Tennant (2002) called on Christian teachers of English to improve their skills and credentials as language teachers in order to win the trust and respect of students. By doing so, they could pave the way for greater opportunities to share their faith in Christ. This paper caused a stir among some in TESOL, and it has stimulated growing interest about what Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003) call the Teaching of English as a Missionary Language (TEML). Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003 p.337) note how shifts in American politics have also had religious implications in the world and the field of TESOL:

The recent shift in global relations, with the rampant ascendancy of an aggressively conservative, capitalist and Christian United States (supported particularly by Anglophone allies against Islamic states), alongside the ever-increasing global clamour for English and its changing role in the world, has led to a set of new and troubling relations between English language teaching and Christian missionary activity.

They offer in their paper a helpful framework for understanding the current battle lines that are being drawn for the growing debate. There are at least five positions in this issue: Christian Evangelical, Christian Service, liberal agnostic, secular humanist and the critical pedagogic position.

The Christian evangelical position aggressively utilizes the resources and opportunities available to TESOL teachers in order to enter schools or countries that normally forbid Christian missionary activity. For example, Yeoman (2002) writes of a

stealth crusade that is designed to undermine Islam by sending Christian missionaries to infiltrate Muslim communities. In the organization website for Christian Outreach International (Pennycook and Coutand-Marin, 2003), ELT is described as "a gold mine rich with mission opportunity". Pennycook and Coutand-Martin (2003) also mention several online testimonies of missionary English teachers who report sharing the Christian Gospel message under the noses of officials in communist countries, because the officials often lacked sufficient proficiency in English to understand what the missionaries were teaching in their classes.

Practices such as these are both bewildering and repellant to Edge, who believes that advocates of this approach "have a moral duty to make that instrumental goal...absolutely explicit at all stages of their work (2003,p.707).

Teachers following the Christian Service approach are open about their faith and mission. By aiming for excellence in their craft and profession, and helping to empower the poor and downtrodden by giving them more opportunities through English, these Christian English Teachers (CETs) hope to do good to others, build trust and rapport, and hope for the opportunity to share the message of the Gospel. "English teaching can be more than a secular job that serves as a means to other ends—English teaching itself becomes a form of Christian mission" (Snow, 2001,p.176). Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003,p.342) question the sincerity of this approach: "at its core, furthermore, there is something disingenuous about the Christian Service argument, for while it highlights social salvation through ELT, the underlying hope is still that spiritual salvation can be achieved through Christianity."

Liberal agnostics feel that any belief system is relative and unquantifiable. One person's sin may become another's virtue. One may have the best of intentions, but the imposition of one's specific beliefs could bring about the opposite intended effect. It is best to focus upon widely held ethical assumptions (equality, freedom, etc.), even though these too may be problematic, depending upon the situation. Religion, therefore, has no place in the language classroom. This view seems to have been espoused by Widdowson (2001,p.14) during his address at the Tokyo AILA Conference:

...belief is, of course, fraught with problematic implications...We come inevitably to intractable moral issues. How can you tell benevolent intervention from malevolent interference; and even if your intervention is well-intentioned, how do you know what negative consequences might follow?

Secular humanists believe that teachers should not introduce religious issues on their own volition, but only if more information on the subject is requested by the students.

This is essentially Edge's (2003) position. He is not against the sharing of religious beliefs per se. What he seems to be concerned with is the potential of Christian teachers to abuse their authority and manipulate students into a dialogue in which they previously had little interest. Earl Stevick (1996), a devout Christian and respected linguist, agrees with Edge that deceit and manipulation should have no part in the mission of a Christian English Teacher, but he takes exception to Edge's view that religion and TESOL should be separate. Stevick (who is American) feels that the TESOL classroom should be likened to a free market where all ideas can be presented to learners. Since many language teachers already introduce topics such as environmentalism, human rights, or gender studies with impunity, why should Christians be required to keep silent about their faith? There is "nothing sinister," Stevick states, about presenting Christianity to students in a way that is "attractive and available" (1996,p.6).

Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003) remain unconvinced, questioning whether the unequal power positions between students and teachers will truly allow for a free market of ideas to be shared. They take the critical pedagogic approach. Building upon Corson (1997, in Pennycook and Coutand-Marin. 2003), the critical pedagogic approach focuses on humanist ethics of mutual respect, equal treatment and seeking the benefit of learners over the needs of the teacher. However, there seems to be an assumption that students will have a compatible system of ethics, be able to receive the same level of treatment, and that all can benefit from the teachers' lessons. While the theological base is very different, in many ways, the visible practices of the critical pedagogic approach appear similar to the Christian Service model. Both strive for excellence, transparency and the benefit of learners. The critical pedagogic approach is no more "disingenuous" than the Christian service position: at its core it still hopes that enlightenment can be found through a liberal academic dialectic. The risks of inequities of power are not mitigated merely by taking a non-theistic critical pedagogic approach. Depending upon the quality of the teacher, either the Christian service position or the critical pedagogic approach is capable of encouraging freedom and analytical thought in a spirit of mutual trust and respect.

While this section has focused mainly on Christian themes within TESOL, similar debate is going on in other religious communities. For example, in many Muslim communities, because English is associated with Western, Christian and anti-Islamic principles (Ozog 1989,p.314), there are calls among some Muslim English Language Teachers to "make English language teaching truly Islamic" (Shafi 1983,p.37). Kachru (2003a) surprised his Japanese audience recently when he quoted the Malaysian Minister of Education as recently stating that the goal behind Malaysia's current English education drive was to spread the message of Islam throughout the world. These remarkable developments suggest that we may be seeing a religious manifestation of the growing regional struggle between America and Muslim nations,

a contest that Castles (2003) stated had been predicted to intensify even before the end of the Cold War.

To conclude this section, Edge is correct in noting that "the mixture of the imperial and the religious is fearsome" (2003a,p.701). Discussions of religion and TESOL again touch upon issues of power, freedom, and cultural sovereignty. The debate on this subject is expected to last for some time, but the resultant discourse should help many to form their own informed opinions as to where they will stand on this issue.

Concerns for the language classroom

Let us now return to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: By teaching TESOL, are we contributing to the improvement of our respective nations and communities, or are we unwittingly cooperating in neocolonial reconstruction? The answer, of course, is that it depends upon the teacher and the students.

Issues for teachers

Whether language teachers serve the interests of the Anglo-American hegemony or focus on the local needs of their learners hinges on the pedagogic beliefs and practices implicit in their lessons. It is felt that language teachers should regularly reflect on *what* they are actually teaching in their classes, *how* they teach the language, and *why* they are teaching English in the first place. Careful attention needs to be paid to the textbooks chosen, and what type of English (American, British, nativized varieties, or a combination of the three) is being quietly upheld as the ideal for students to model.

Language teachers would benefit from clearly identifying what they believe about the spread of English, and design their lessons accordingly. Regardless of whether they believe in teaching EIL, support an Anglo-American model, or are committed to teaching English as an Islamic language, they should prepare their lessons in ways so that these goals are met. Language teachers should be true to themselves, their identity and their life goals. However, such purpose-driven language teachers should be careful to work in a manner that is respectful to the differing views of others. While language teachers should also be explicit about their religious orientation and political ideology, they should also dedicate serious seasons of reflection as to how those beliefs may influence their pedagogic practices.

Issues for students

At a minimum, it is felt that learners should be exposed to a variety of views, types of teachers (bilingual experts from the expanding circle countries as well as well-trained

teachers from the inner and outer circle), and materials that take local as well as Anglophone interests in mind. In light of the developments taking place in the world and the field of TESOL, where appropriate, students should also be given more information about the matters discussed in this paper. For example, language lessons centering on English and actual economic opportunities in their country, possible Anglo-American beliefs in teaching materials, or the political implications of English as an International Language, could help stimulate critical thought about some of the larger issues relevant to English language study. Students should be better informed so they can choose for themselves if they want to support or subvert the hegemonic implications of conforming to Anglo-American norms. They should also be made aware of the potential punishments and rewards that may result from their decisions. As it appears that EIL is often used by distinct discourse communities interacting on a domain of common interest, students might benefit from a needs analysis which would identify the type of international discourse community they would be most interested in, followed by the development of teaching materials which would assist them in participating in their chosen discourse community.

Conclusion

It is recognized that this paper may raise more questions than it attempts to answer. For example, is imperialism avoidable? Are nation-states, with their respective sociolinguistic classes of elite and oppressed, simply smaller versions of what is happening on an international scale? If the continued spread of English is to be construed as an unwelcome development, what can be done to replace it without major disruption on a global scale? Given that the dynamics of empire building is as ancient as the history of civilization, and if America is deemed an unjust, unwelcome cultural and linguistic influence in the world, could the United Nations replace the US? If not is it truly possible to go back to the political, economic and linguistic situation of the 1890s, when nation-states had greater autonomy in their internal and external affairs?

These and more questions await our critical examination. This paper has only sought to begin the process by reflecting on the possible influence of the Anglo-American worldview interacting with the powerful domains of economics, cultural politics and religion as it relates to TESOL.

Instead of myopically teaching English, with a view only on what to teach for the next class, all language teachers are encouraged to consider the ramifications of their English language lessons for their community, their nation and their world. In doing so, it is hoped that more language teachers will form their own views about the issues discussed in this paper, and in doing so, be able to make informed pedagogic decisions for their classes.

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